

Indiana NRCS 2016 Annual Report

THE USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS) PROVIDES INNOVATIVE CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS TO RESTORE, ENHANCE AND PROTECT INDIANA'S WORKING LANDS.

NRCS is an agency that does work no one else is doing. Each day we work with our conservation partners and private landowners in Indiana to improve the health of our communities by making our farms more resilient to extreme weather and improving our water, forestry, energy, and wildlife resources. We are doing this in ways where farmers do not have to sacrifice production for conservation, or profitability for sustainability. Our voluntary Farm Bill programs provide technical and financial assistance to help private landowners address natural resource concerns such as soil erosion, water quality, wildlife habitat, and much more. We work with farmers and landowners whether they have one acre or thousands to develop conservation plans and provide advice that helps them manage natural resource concerns on their land. I am pleased to provide this report of Indiana NRCS investments and successes in fiscal year 2016.

- Jane Hardisty, State Conservationist

Indiana NRCS FY16 Investments on Private Working Agricultural Lands



Environmental Quality Incentives Program
Contracts 864
Acres 124,132
Dollars \$23,809,601



Conservation Stewardship Program
Contracts 108
Acres 86,893
Dollars \$1,531,128



Regional Conservation Partnership Program
Contracts 21
Acres 4,405
Dollars \$557,168



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
Wetland Reserve Easements
Contracts 17
Acres 1,645
Dollars \$6,900,000



Voluntary Conservation Works

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Seeing the ground continue to improve year after year with more organic matter and less erosion is rewarding.

-Joe Keusch, Landowner

RECLAIMING MINELAND

As a fifth generation farmer, Joe Keusch knows a thing or two about his land. And, his 110 year old farm located in the Ell Creek Watershed is a little different than most in Indiana.

A portion of Keusch's farm is part of a former coal mine. Sediment runoff is a great concern on land that has been mined because it lacks the vegetative cover and topsoil to infiltrate, filter, or slow down runoff. When the mine was reclaimed as farmland, Keusch struggled with restoring the productivity of his soil.

Three years ago, Keusch enlisted the help of Dubois County NRCS District Conservationist Bart Pitstick, and was introduced to a variety of soil health practices available through the agency's National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) program.

Keusch and Pitstick walked the family farm to talk about natural resource concerns and goals for the land; and together they developed a comprehensive conservation plan to make the farm more productive and sustainable.

As a first step, Keusch planted cover crops on the reclaimed land. In three short years, the microbiological activity has returned to the soil.

Keusch and Pitstick are already working on the next phase of his conservation plan. In addition to cover crops, the new NWQI contract includes practices, such as critical area planting, diversion, mulching, subsurface drain, amending soil properties with gypsiferous products, grade stabilization structure, grassed waterway, nutrient management, and a water control structure. These practices will improve water quality not only on the Keusch farm but in the entire community.

National Landscape Conservation Initiatives



Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Contracts 35
Acres 8,601
Dollars \$970,023



Joint Chief's Landscape Restoration Project

Contracts 70
Acres 4,869
Dollars \$893,959



Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Contracts 29
Acres 7,184
Dollars \$1,259,552



Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project

Contracts 21
Acres 61
Dollars \$57,350



National Water Quality Initiative

Contracts 9
Acres 2,350
Dollars \$310,080



Western Lake Erie Basin Initiative

Contracts 32
Acres 7,738
Dollars \$792,530



Wildlife Initiative

Contracts 31
Acres 536
Dollars \$209,245

Technical Assistance Programs



Conservation Reserve Program

Contracts 35,489
Acres 236,075
New Acres ... 30,201
Dollars \$209,245

Emergency Watershed Protection Program



Financial Assistance

Carroll County...\$750,000
Parke County.... \$100,000



Technical Assistance

Carroll County...\$150,000
Parke County.... \$20,000

National Program Initiatives



On-Farm Energy Initiative

Contracts 5
Acres 18
Dollars \$48,896



Organic Initiative

Contracts 7
Acres 537
Dollars \$201,327



Specialty Crop Initiative

Contracts 50
Acres 161
Dollars \$446,705



TRANSECT RESULTS

NRCS has been supporting the tillage transect since 1990. This partnership activity is a critical tool in helping us determine how much conservation is adopted above and beyond the financial assistance programs, tracking true voluntary conservation and sharing the full story of conservation adoption in Indiana. Such efforts are particularly rewarding when the results show that Indiana is a national leader in soil conservation and water quality. The results show Indiana is second in the nation in acres of cover crops planted which is important during weather extremes like those we experienced this year.

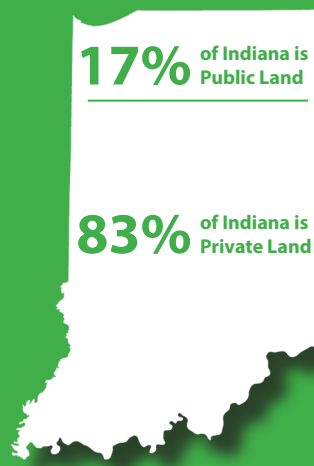
The FY16 fall transect estimated more than one million acres of living plant cover (e.g., cover crops and winter cereal grains) were planted on Indiana farms last year. This living cover protects soil from rain, snow and extreme cold, and retains valuable nutrients in fields benefiting water quality, and feeding diverse populations of soil biology. Residues protected from environmental elements play a key role in building soil organic matter and soil health. The report also shows most Indiana farmers left their tillage equipment in the shed this past fall to protect their fields with harvested crop residues. The results show that 55% of Indiana's harvested cropland was left undisturbed during the winter months.

TOP FIVE MOST CONTRACTED CONSERVATION PRACTICES

1. Cover Crops
2. Waste Storage Facility
3. Nutrient Management
4. Brush Management
5. Water and Sediment Control Basins

TOP FIVE NATURAL RESOURCE CONCERNS IN INDIANA

1. Excess Sediment and Nutrients
2. Invasive Plants
3. Wildlife Habitat
4. Energy Efficiency
5. Livestock Management



19.4
Millions of acres in Farm and Forest

58,695
Number of Farms in Indiana

253
Average size of Indiana Farm

- 2nd**
in U.S. for tomatoes, total eggs
- 3rd**
in U.S. for soybeans, chicken, cantaloupe
- 4th**
in U.S. for peppermint, turkeys



Special Audiences



Beginning Farmers

Contracts 62
Acres 10,421
Dollars \$1,749,789



Limited Resource Farmers

Contracts 3
Acres 278
Dollars \$32,524

Earth Team Volunteers

NRCS is proud of the dedicated Earth Team volunteers and staff who have committed their time and talents to conserving and protecting our natural resources.

During Fiscal Year 2016, more than 2,480 Indiana Earth Team volunteers donated 13,670 hours. Time dedicated by these volunteers to educational efforts, conservation planning and clerical services saved NRCS approximate \$322,000 and supported conservation in every single field office in Indiana.



THE PIONEERS OF PRAIRIE RESTORATION

The Kankakee Sands Preserve in Newton County, Indiana is more than 7,000 acres of restored wetlands and prairie. These restored acres serve as the connecting piece between Willow Slough Fish and Wildlife Area, Beaver Lake Nature Preserve, Conrad Savanna Nature Preserve and The Nature Conservancy's Conrad Station Savanna – all together over 30,000 acres of contiguous natural habitat are protected in Indiana and Illinois. The area sits on what was once Indiana's largest lake, Beaver Lake.

The Efroymson Restoration at Kankakee Sands Preserve is the one of the largest restorations east of the Mississippi and includes wet, mesic, and dry prairie restoration plantings, as well as marsh and emergent areas.

Since 1997, NRCS has been partnering with The Nature Conservancy to restore wetlands and prairie on their property. To date, there are more than 4,500 acres in conservation easements under the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) on the property. These easements are interspersed amongst thousands of acres of non-easement restoration, and adjacent protected lands owned by the Division of Fish and Wildlife and Division of Nature Preserves. Together, these projects provide a large contiguous tract of land, with significant connectivity between valuable and unique habitats.

In 2016, TNC introduced a herd of 23 bison to the property to serve as a land management tool. Bison are herbivores that forage primarily on grasses and sedges. They also churn up the soil and create wallows or shallow depressions. All of this activity will have a positive effect on the prairie system by providing water for amphibians and wildlife, wildflowers for pollinators and other beneficial insects, and habitat for rare plants and birds.

TNC will monitor the effects of bison on the restorations of Kankakee Sands and the data they collect will be used to guide their management practices. Their findings will benefit conservation professionals everywhere. The bison will help not only with land management, but help TNC educate the public about the benefits of these restored areas to the health of this rural community.



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